

Unemployment benefits running out? Republican Senator says 'tough shit'

WASHINGTON, D.C. — For routine business, the U.S. Senate operates on the basis of "unanimous consent," meaning they only proceed if no senator objects. On Feb. 26, Sen. Jim Bunning (R-Kentucky) decided to withhold consent on allowing a vote on a bill authorizing a 30-day extension of unemployment insurance benefits, COBRA health insurance subsidies for laid-off workers, delaying cuts to Medicare reimbursement rates to doctors, and other items. An estimated 1.2 million American workers could lose unemployment benefits in March if the Senate doesn't act to renew. Two days before the expirations would begin, Bunning said he wanted them to be paid for out of stimulus money.

Oregon U.S. Sen. Jeff Merkley reportedly pleaded with Bunning to drop his objection, to which Bunning replied, "tough shit."

Senate rules allow tremendous latitude for individual senators to obstruct. Bunning's action put off the re-authorizations, with a series of effects that began March 2, including furloughs of construction workers on some federal projects, loss of unemployment benefits for others, and cuts in Medicare rates to doctors. The dispute had yet to be resolved as of press time.

Unions make donations to motorcycle 'poker run' event

The 8th annual Motorcycle Poker Run, chili cook-off, and raffle will be held Saturday, June 12, starting and finishing at IBEW Local 48.

The event is sponsored by Unions for Kids, a non-profit all-volunteer group of union members and contractors who raise money for Doernbecher Children's Hospital.

A major part of the fundraiser is a raffle for a new Harley-Davidson motorcycle. This year it's a 2010 Heritage Softail Classic in red-hot sunglo. The retail value is \$18,804. Tickets are \$10 each, with only 4,000 sold.

Additional ways the group raises money is through corporate and/or union sponsorships, donations of cash

and prizes for a silent auction, and volunteering.

Exterior/Interior Specialists Local 2154 has donated \$2,154 to this year's event. Several other union locals have kicked in \$1,000 each, including Amalgamated Transit Union Local 757, the Pacific Northwest Regional Council of Carpenters, International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers Locals 48, 280 and 302; and Machinists Lodge 63.

"The challenge is on," said Lee Duncan, an IBEW Local 48 member and president of Unions for Kids.

For more information about the event, including where to purchase tickets, visit their Web site at www.unionsforkids.org.

Hawaii nurses, umpires affiliate with Office and Professional Employees

The Hawaii Nurses Association and the Association of Minor League Umpires have voted to affiliate with Office and Professional Employees International Union, AFL-CIO.

The 4,000-member Hawaii Nurses Association withdrew from the United American Nurses (UAN), which was dissolved in 2009 following an internal dispute. UAN ultimately merged with the California Nurses Association/National Nurses Organizing Committee to form National Nurses United.

HNA was given the official local number, OPEIU Local 50 because Hawaii is the 50th state.

The 215 members of the Associa-

tion of Minor League Umpires, based in Massachusetts, voted to affiliate with OPEIU. The union will be known as AMLU/OPEIU Guild 322 (3 balls, 2 strikes, 2 outs).

Prior to its formation in 2000, minor league umpires had been working with no representation. Since that time, the independent union was able to secure health insurance for umpires and establish a ranking and promotion system to standardize movement up through the various leagues. Despite those changes and a strike that was honored by 100 percent of the umpires in 2006, some key goals were not obtained.

"We're now looking to take the um-

pires to another level and secure rights and benefits afforded to other baseball professionals, including wage improvements, job security and better working conditions," OPEIU said in a statement.

The life of a minor league umpire is difficult, with low pay, no vacation or sick time and no ability to return home during the long season, which lasts from spring training in March to mid to late September. Salary for a minor league umpire starts at \$1,800 per month and is only paid during the season, forcing the umpires to work a second or third job during the off-season.

Minor league umpires work regularly in Major League Baseball, filling in for sick, injured or vacationing full-time umpires. More than 1,300 regular season MLB games had at least one AMLU member on the field in the 2009 season.

Vote makes it final: Laurelhurst Village will be a union nursing home

Workers at Southeast Portland's Laurelhurst Village nursing home reaffirmed their decision to unionize in a Feb. 16 election conducted by the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB). In a unit of 144, the vote was 76 to 23 in favor of joining Service Employees International Union Local 503.

Parent company Farmington Centers had already agreed to recognize and bargain with Local 503 in November, after a majority of employees signed union authorization cards. But under a rule devised by the Bush-era NLRB, such card check certifications can be set aside in favor of a traditional workplace union election if 30 percent of the workers sign a petition requesting it.

Local 503 spokesperson Ed Hershey said having to run the union campaign a second time only made union supporters more determined. Farmington Centers honored its pledge to remain neutral during the campaign, Hershey said.

The two sides immediately returned to the bargaining table, where they are negotiating a first contract.

Carpenters go for Kitzhaber

The Pacific Northwest Regional Council of Carpenters endorsed John Kitzhaber for governor at its quarterly council delegate meeting Feb. 20.

"Job creation is our only priority this election cycle, and John Kitzhaber is the only candidate for governor that we trust to grow our economy," said Carpenters Political Director John Little. "We have known John for a long time and we trust him. He has always understood the needs of working families throughout the state."

The Pacific Northwest Regional Council of Carpenters represents over 20,000 carpenters, piledrivers, dry-wallers, millwrights, trade show workers, shipwrights, exterior/interior spe-

cialists, scaffold erectors, insulators and related craft workers.

The Carpenters were the top donor to Kitzhaber's 1998 re-election campaign.

Other unions supporting Kitzhaber are United Food and Commercial Workers Local 555, the Oregon State Building and Construction Trades Council, the Oregon State Council of Firefighters, and International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers Local 48.

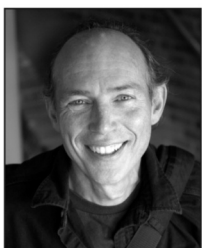
Obama taps SEIU's Andy Stern for new deficit cutting panel

Andy Stern, president of the Service Employees International Union, was named by President Barack Obama to a commission on cutting the federal deficit. The 18-member National Commission on Fiscal Responsibility was created by Obama to come up with recommendations for steps to reduce the federal deficit, which is forecast to hit a record \$1.6 trillion this year. The commission may recommend tax increases, spending cuts or a combination of both to reduce U.S. deficits.

Selected as co-chairs of the commission are former Democratic White House official Erskine Bowles and former Wyoming Republican Senator Alan Simpson.



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